

Tools for Tomorrow: Women in Trades & Technology Program Madison Area Technical College

The Tools for Tomorrow Program is designed to improve women's preparation for, access to, and retention in high skill construction, industrial and technical careers through a network of services. Women interested in learning more about these career opportunities begin by attending a three-hour Women in Trades & Technology **Career Information Session**. This session provides an introduction to the variety, benefits and barriers of nontraditional occupations; current labor market information; and a description of training options. The program offers two free career exploration workshops annually with each 100-hour workshop focusing on a distinct occupational cluster. **Tools for the Trades** targets construction-related careers with employment that is typically outdoors and physically demanding, with training frequently obtained through apprenticeships. **Tools for Technology** concentrates on technical or skilled industrial careers with employment typically indoors in a shop, lab, office or manufacturing setting, with training usually obtained through degree and diploma programs.

Both workshops provide participants with an overview of approximately 10 careers within the targeted cluster. Activities include hands-on labs that integrate proper tool and equipment use, job terminology, related math, print reading, and safety procedures. Additional topics include instruction on methods of entry into the career, job seeking skills, and pre-employment test preparation techniques. Instructors and guest panelists are tradeswomen and men, employers, and MATC staff, who can share their personal success stories with the students, providing a natural networking component throughout the workshops.

Tools for Tomorrow provides advising, information and referral, and mentoring services for nontraditional students. The **Tools Mentoring Project** matches female mentors who are experienced professionals with a woman newly entering training or employment in a related career area. The mentors foster the professional growth and personal development of the student, provide networking opportunities, and act as a sounding board for questions and issues that may arise. A mentor can be essential at the early career stages when a great deal depends on the student's motivation and persistence in preparing for an occupation, especially in areas nontraditional for women. Another program activity is the Women in Trades & Technology Careers **Speaker Bureau** composed of volunteers who participate as guest speakers, panelists, or instructors at schools, community events, industry conferences, or media interviews to raise positive community awareness about these career options.

Funding for the program is provided by the federal Perkins Vocational & Technical Education Act through two grants: the Perkins Special Populations Basic Grant with matching funds from MATC and the Perkins Reserve Funds Grant. The program is administered within the Apprenticeship Department of the AAT&I Division. For more information, contact Mary T. Knight, Coordinator, at (608) 246-5286 or via email at mknight@matcmadison.edu.